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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on adults on public assistance who enrolled in community and technical colleges (Washington) in the fall quarter 1997. Comparisons are made to adult recipients of public assistance enrolled in community and technical colleges in the fall quarter 1996. Major findings are as follows: (1) the enrollment of welfare recipients fell 23% from 15,310 in fall 1996 to 11,861 in fall 1997, largely due to the decrease in the number of adult welfare recipients; (2) the percentage of students on public assistance who were new to college fell slightly from 22% in fall 1996 to 21% in fall 1997; (3) consistent with anticipated policy changes, fewer new students planned to pursue a degree; (4) the percent of course effort put into vocational programs increased from 43% in fall 1996 to 46% a year later, while the percent of effort in the basic skills area fell from 27% to 25%; and (5) as the number of adult recipients continues to decline, it is apparent that the needs of working poor students not on assistance will require more consideration. Specific details, and corresponding charts, are provided for welfare enrollment, projected number of adult welfare recipients for the state, characteristics of welfare students enrolled, college attendance figures for this group, and percent of course effort by intent (vocational, developmental studies, basic skills, and academic courses). (AS)

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Washington State Board
for
Community and Technical Colleges

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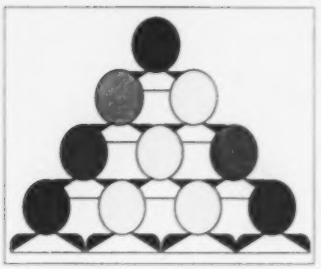

Research Report
No. 98-3

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Education Division

WELFARE ENROLLMENTS IN WASHINGTON COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES FALL QUARTER 1997

March 1998

Overview

This report focuses on adults on public assistance who enrolled in community and technical colleges in the fall quarter 1997[1]. Comparisons are made to adult recipients of public assistance enrolled in community and technical colleges in the fall quarter 1996. Three significant changes occurred in the interim period:

Summary of Findings

- The number of adults on public assistance fell 16 percent, from 97,468 in October 1996 to 81,455 recipients in October 1997. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) adults comprised 97 percent of these recipients. The number of TANF adults fell at the slightly higher rate of 17 percent, from 95,131 adults in October 1996 to 79,349 adults in October 1997.

- State and local agencies began planning how to implement Washington State's Work-First that will require TANF recipients to search for a job as a first step and place time limits on public assistance benefits they can receive.

- The Department of Social and Health Services adopted a transition policy that allowed welfare students already enrolled in college programs to continue if they could complete their programs by June 30, 1998. This policy largely affected vocational students.

[1] Adults on welfare included recipients in the month of October for Aid for Dependent Children/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (AFDC/TANF), and Refugee and General Assistance for Pregnant Women. The count is slightly smaller than might have been attained through counting welfare recipients in any month in fall quarter.

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Summary of Findings

- Headcount enrollments of welfare recipients fell 23 percent, from 15,310 adults in fall quarter 1996 to 11,861 in fall quarter 1997 . The college participation rate for adults on welfare decreased from 15.7 percent to 14.6 percent.

- About 70 percent of the decline was due to the decrease in the number of adult welfare recipients. Thirty (30) percent resulted from anticipated policy changes.

- Over the next two years college enrollments will continue to decline due to a 10 percent further decline in the number of adult welfare recipients. Projecting October to October, the total number of adult recipients may fall to 71,000 by 1999. At the same time, welfare policy will have an increasing effect on participation as Work First requirements are fully implemented.

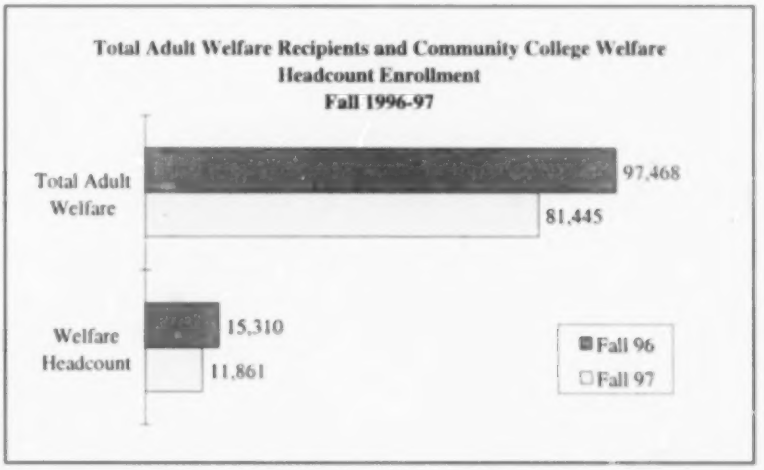
- The welfare transition policy had a modest effect on who enrolled in college. The percentage of students on public assistance who were new to college fell slightly from 22 percent in fall quarter 1996 to 21 percent in fall quarter 1997. The percentage of returning students who enrolled in college increased from 60 percent in fall 1996 to 63 percent fall 1997.

- Consistent with anticipated policy changes, there was also a modest shift in the length of time that new students planned to attend as fewer new students planned to pursue a degree (30 percent in fall 1997 compared to 33 percent in fall 1996).

- Consistent with headcount decline, course effort fell by 2,843 FTEs (23 percent). The percent of course effort put into vocational programs increased from 43 percent in fall 1996 to 46 percent fall 1997. At the same time, fewer students attended for basic skills and the percent of effort in this area fell from 27 percent to 25 percent.

- Finally, as the number of adult recipients continues to decline, it is apparent that the needs of working poor students not on assistance will require more consideration.

Welfare Enrollment: Fall headcount enrollment of students on welfare in October fell 23 percent, from 15,310 adults receiving welfare in 1996 to 11,861 adults receiving welfare in 1997.



Seventy (70) percent of the change in college headcount enrollment was due to 16 percent fewer adults on welfare one year later. Thirty (30) percent was due to policy changes as welfare moved into TANF. This resulted in a decrease in college participation from 15.7 percent to 14.6 percent of the total adults on welfare.

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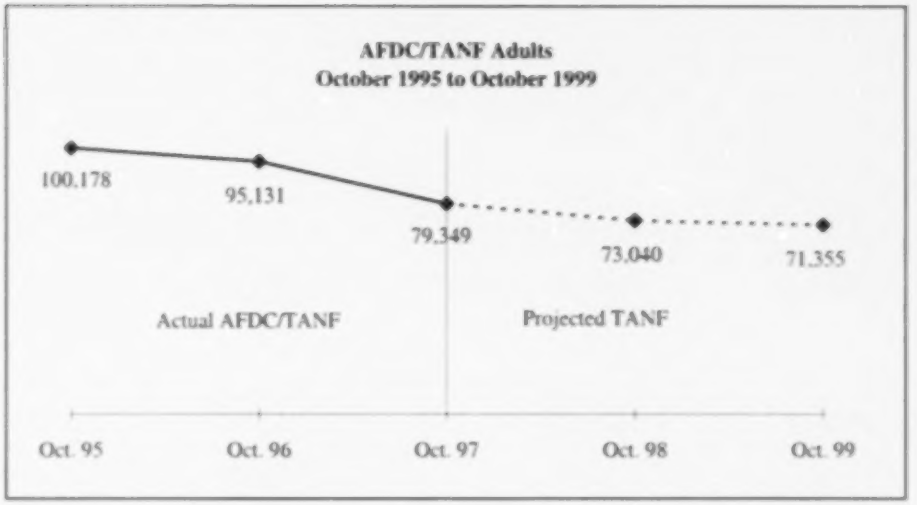
Projected TANF Adults: Ninety-seven (97) percent of the welfare adults enrolled in colleges received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or its preceding program, Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC). The others received Refugee Assistance (2 percent) or General Assistance for Pregnant Women (1 percent).



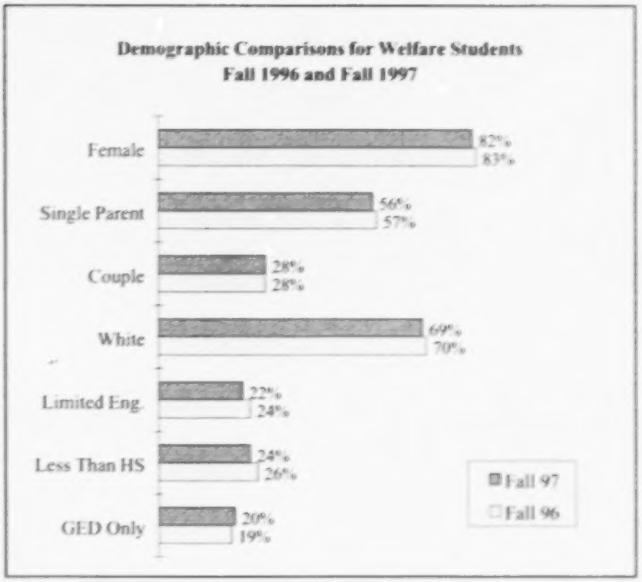
The number of TANF adults is dependent upon total TANF caseloads. Caseloads declined nearly 12 percent from October 1996 to October 1997. In that period, adult TANF recipients declined 17 percent, from 95,131 to 79,349.

Over the next two years, OFM forecasts TANF caseloads will decline a further 7.6 percent in an October 1997 to October 1999 comparison. The decline may be as high as 10 percent when adjustments based upon recent forecast variance are factored. SBCTC has compared OFM projections to adult recipients and estimates the corresponding decline for TANF adults may be 10 to 13 percent in this period. This could bring the number of TANF adults below 70,000 by October 1999.

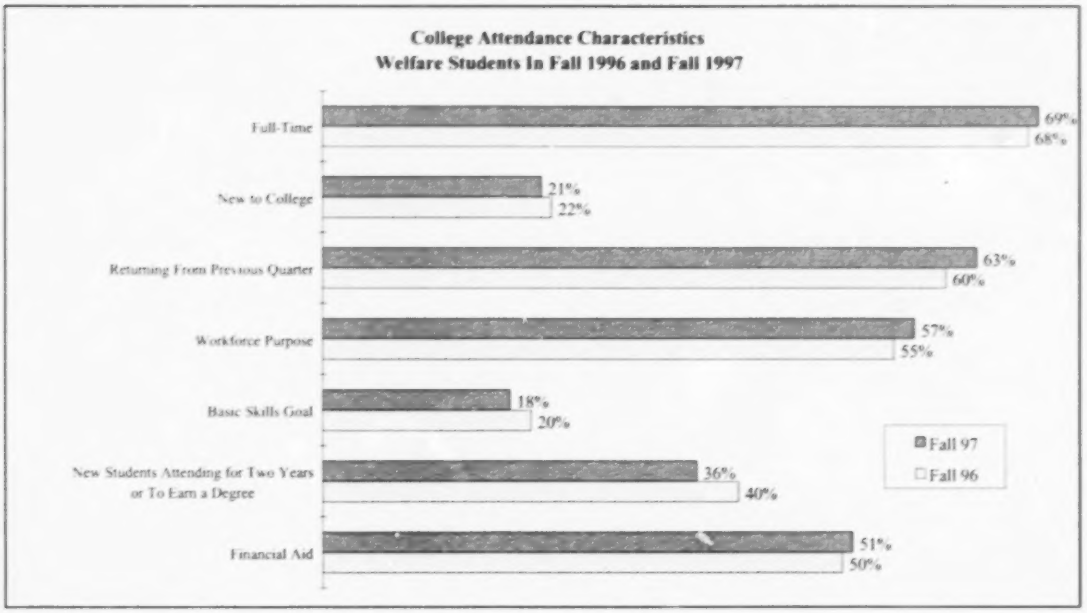
Based upon the projection, there may be as many as 30,000 fewer adult recipients in October 1999 as there were in October 1995. While there may not be a direct correlation, it becomes apparent that many of the adults formerly on welfare are now off of it. To meet the needs of all low income adults, colleges need to learn about the training and education needs of the working poor no longer on welfare as well.

Characteristics of Welfare Students Enrolled: Characteristics of welfare students stayed relatively the same from fall 1996 to fall 1997.

Students with less than high school education enrolled at a slightly lower rate (24 percent compared to 26 percent). This may have been a result of the transition policy which allowed basic skills students to continue only if they were enrolled in a vocational program.



College Attendance: Overall, there was modest change in student attendance in October 1997 compared to October 1996. The transition policy may have resulted in slight changes in the percentages of returning and new students (the former increased 3 percent; the latter decreased 1 percent). New students also planned to attend for shorter lengths of study as the percentage planning to attend for two years or long enough to earn a degree has decreased 4 percent.



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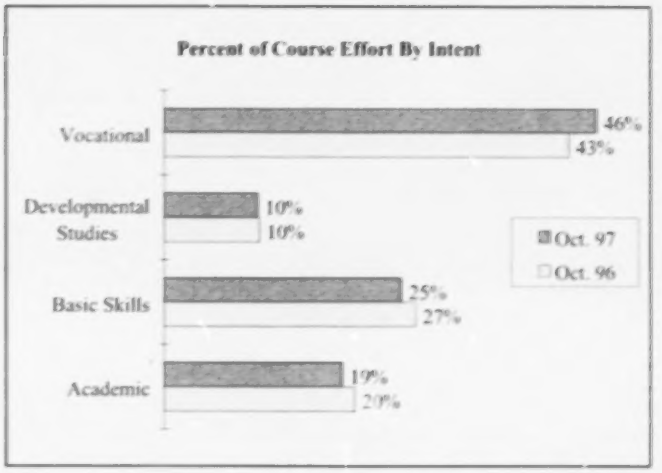
FTEs and Course Effort: Course effort fell 23 percent, from 12,287 FTEs in fall 1996 to 9,444FTEs in fall 1997 for those on welfare in October.

A greater percentage ofFTEs were applied to vocational course effort than the year before and fewerFTEs were applied to basic skills.



Conclusion

October 1997 welfare student headcount was 23 percent below the October 1996 headcount due to the combined effects of fewer adults on public assistance and anticipated policy changes that affected college participation for adults who did receive welfare. Over the next two years the number of adult TANF recipients will decline 10 to 13 percent further, meaning fewer welfare student enrollments. At the same time, new work requirements will be more intensively implemented, having even stronger influence on college participation. The overall decline in welfare adults makes it apparent that more working poor students, not on welfare, will be in need of training and education opportunities, and that trying to identify these students through public assistance use may not be sufficient for learning about their needs.

Sources: SBCTC Data Warehouse and DSHS Public Assistance Data Match

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